

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-07 NSC-10 SPC-03 SS-20 RSC-01 INR-10

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R 020615Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6448

INFO SECDEF

JCS

CINCPAC

CIA

DEPCHIEF UDORN

S E C R E T VIENTIANE 7477

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, MCAP, EAID, LA

SUBJECT: RLGAFF FORCE STRUCTURE

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

REF: A. VIENTIANE 6250; B. VIENTIANE 7379

BEGIN SUMMARY: I AGREE WITH RLG THAT A REDUCTION IN  
RLGAFF FORCE LEVEL FROM CURRENT STRENGTH OF ABOUT 80,000  
TO 50,000 BY END JUNE 1974 IS UNREALISTIC AND  
INADVISABLE. I RECOMMEND THAT WE PLAN FOR A RLGAFF  
FORCE LEVEL OF 60,000 BY END OF FY-74 AND 50,000 BY  
END OF FY 75. THIS PLAN WOULD ALSO GREATLY FACILITATE  
INTEGRATION OF FORMER LIF INTO RLGAFF AND ENHANCE PROSPECTS  
OF KEEPING THESE EXPERIENCED INFANTRYMEN IN THE ARMY AND  
ARRANGING FOR CUTS IN FAR SUPPORT TROOPS. DETAILED COST  
FIGURES WILL BE TRANSMITTED SEPTEL, BUT MEANWHILE I URGE  
ENDORSEMENT OF CONCEPTS SET FORTH THIS MESSAGE. END SUMMARY

1. IN PLANNING FY-75 MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO LAOS, I HAVE  
BECOME INCREASINGLY CONCERNED WITH TIMING FOR REDUCTION OF  
CURRENT RLGAFF FORCE OF ABOUT 80,000 TO DESIRED LEVEL OF

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50,000 BY END FY-75. IN REF A, WE EMPHASIZED IMPORTANCE

OF CARRYING OUT THESE REDUCTIONS IN AN ORDERLY MANNER, TO AVOID DISMEMBERING RLGAFF AND DISRUPTING POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EQUILIBRIUM IN RLG ZONE. AS NOTED REF B, LAO DEFENSE MINISTER SISOUK, ON BEHALF OF PRIME MINISTER, ADVOCATED STRONGLY DURING MEETINGS WITH SENIOR USG OFFICIALS IN WASHINGTON (OCTOBER 15-17) THAT REDUCING RLGAFF FORCE BELOW 60,000 BY END FY-74 WOULD BE DEFINITELY UNREALISTIC AND INADVISABLE.

2. I AGREE WITH SISOUK'S POSITION. FOR REASONS DETAILED BELOW, I BELIEVE THAT OUR INTERESTS IN LAOS WILL BE SERVED BEST BY REDUCING RLGAFF STRENGTH IN REGULAR INCREMENTS OVER 15 TO 18 MONTH PERIOD ENDING LATE FY-75. THIS PLAN TO STRETCH OUT REDUCTION, HAS BEEN PARTIALLY NECESSITATED BY DELAYS IN FORMATION OF NEW PGNU. IT WOULD AIM AT BEGINNING REDUCTIONS EARLY IN CY-74, REACHING 60,000 FIGURE BY END FY-74 AND REACHING 50,000 BY END FY-75.

3. OUR REASONS FOR ENDORSING PRIME MINISTER'S VIEWPOINT AS PRESCRIBED BY SISOUK ARE AS FOLLOWS:

A. NEXT 18 MONTHS WILL BE ONE OF MOST CRITICAL PERIODS IN LAO POLITICAL HISTORY AS SOUVANNA BEGINS DIFFICULT TASK OF REINTEGRATING LPF IN NEW PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNION (PGNU). HE WILL NEED ALL AVAILABLE POLITICAL LEVERAGE AND USG SUPPORT TO BALANCE CONFLICTING FORCES ON BOTH THE RIGHT AND LEFT. LPF MAY WELL EXPLOIT ANY WEAKNESS OF RLG AND THEREBY PROVOKE CONSERVATIVE FORCES TO RETALIATE. THIS COULD PRECIPITATE A PERIOD OF DOMESTIC TURMOIL WHICH WOULD JEOPARDIZE PROMISING FOUNDATIONS SO PAINFULLY BUILT DURING PAST YEAR.

B. REDUCTION TO 50,000 FORCE LEVEL BY JUNE 74 WOULD STRAIN RLG CAPACITY TO ABSORB VETERANS INTO CIVILIAN LIFE. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT, RATHER THAN CREATE A NEW ARMY OF UNEMPLOYED, IT WOULD BE MUCH MORE PRUDENT TO KEEP THESE ADDITIONAL FORCES IN UNIFORM FOR SEVERAL MORE MONTHS.

C. IT WOULD FACILITATE INTEGRATING FORMER LIF INTO RLGAFF AND INCREASE CHANCES OF KEEPING THESE FIGHTERS IN SECRET

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THE ARMY AS RLGAFF TOTAL STRENGTH IS REDUCED OVER NEXT 15-18 MONTHS. WE WISH TO MAINTAIN MAXIMUM NUMBER OF FORMER LIF IN RLGAFF BECAUSE:

(I) THE LIF IS THE STURDIEST MILITARY FORCE IN THE COUNTRY AND ITS LOSS WOULD SERIOUSLY DIMINISH THE OVERALL CAPABILITY OF THE RLGAFF, THEREBY VIOLATING THE PRECEPTS OF STATE 060000 (NOT TO IMPAIR EXISTING

RLG MILITARY OPERATIONAL CAPABILITIES); AND

(II) THE LIF CONSTITUTES ABOUT HALF OF THE FIGHTING FORCE IN MRS I AND III AND THE ENTIRE FIGHTING FORCE IN MR II, WHICH IS A REGION ESPECIALLY CRITICAL TO THE RLG. WE WILL DO OUR UTMOST TO HAVE FAR TRIM ITS OWN NUMBERS (PARTICULARLY SERVICE SUPPORT ELEMENTS) AND TO PROVIDE FOR FULL INTEGRATION OF MAXIMUM NUMBER OF FORMER LIF. WE HAVE NO GUARANTEE THAT THEY WILL DO SO, BUT THE PROSPECTS WOULD BE ENHANCED IF RLGAF IS NOT OBLIGED TO COMPLETE RADICAL 30,000-MAN CUT BY END FY-74. MOREOVER, IF WE ARE AUTHORIZED TO PROCEED WITH OUR PLAN FOR ORDERLY REDUCTION, WE WOULD, IN AGREEMENT WITH RLGAF ON THIS QUESTION, INCORPORATE A SPECIFIC UNDERSTANDING THAT NON-COMBAT SERVICE SUPPORT ELEMENTS BEAR FAIR SHARE OF REDUCTION, THAT LIF NOT BE CUT DISPROPORTIONATELY, AND, CONSEQUENTLY, THAT A STIPULATED PERCENTAGE OF THE REMAINING TROOPS BE IN COMBAT UNITS.

4. WHEN I REVIEWED WITH MINISTER SISOUK ON NOVEMBER 1 OUR THINKING AS SET FORTH IN PARAGRAPH (3) ABOVE, STRESSING THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING EFFECTIVE LAO COMBAT FORCE IN BEING, I.E. MAINTAINING THE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF LIF INFANTRY-MEN AND REDUCING DRASTICALLY SOME FAR SUPPORT UNITS SUCH AS VIENTIANE HEADQUARTERS STAFF, I WAS GRATIFIED TO FIND SISOUK IN FULL AGREEMENT. HE STRESSED THAT ON BASIS HIS 3-1/2 YEARS EXPERIENCE AS ACTING MINISTER DEFENSE, HE IS FULLY AWARE THAT LIF IS MOST EFFECTIVE LAO FIGHTING FORCE AND THAT IN ANY FORCE REDUCTION, EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO RETAIN PERSONNEL OF FORMER LIF AND TO HAVE FAR BEAR THE BRUNT OF REDUCTION. THIS PRINCIPLE HE THOUGHT SHOULD HOLD BOTH FOR 60,000 AND SUBSEQUENT 50,000 FORCE LEVEL. HE OFFERED TO SELL THIS CONCEPT TO FAR GENERALS IN A SERIES OF

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MEETINGS HE PLANS TO HOLD DURING FIRST HALF OF THIS MONTH.

5. WHILE THE FOREGOING PROPOSAL WILL REQUIRE SOME UPWARD ADJUSTMENT IN THE LAO MILITARY PROGRAM FIGURES, DAO HAS PREPARED A PRELIMINARY STUDY INDICATING THAT THE COST WOULD NOT EXCEED DOD PROGRAM CEILING OF \$91 MILLION FOR FY-75. THESE PRELIMINARY FIGURES SUGGEST THAT THE STRETCH-OUT PLAN WOULD RAISE THE FY-75 PROGRAM COSTS FROM \$76 TO ABOUT \$86 MILLION. THIS, OF COURSE, STILL REPRESENTS ABOUT \$19.0 MILLION CUT FROM THE FY-74 PROGRAM LEVEL OF \$105. DAO IS NOW DRAWING UP DETAILED COSTS FIGURES, WHICH WILL BE TRANSMITTED SEPTTEL. MEANWHILE, I STRONGLY URGE APPROPRIATE AGENCIES IN WASHINGTON TO ENDORSE PROCEDURES AND FORCE LEVELS I HAVE OUTLINED ABOVE, SINCE WE HAVE ONLY A FEW MONTHS TO PLAN FOR WHATEVER

REDUCTIONS ARE DETERMINED.

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